DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 260 752 JC 850 464

AUTHOR Creamer, Don G.
TITLE Two-Year College Research on Student Development: An Analysis of Selected Literature, 1975-1984.
INSTITUTION American Coll. Personnel Association, Washington, D.C. Commission XI-Two Year Coll. Student Development.
PUB DATE Mar 85
NOTE 21p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Colleges; *Educational Research; Literature Reviews; Research Reports; Student Development; *Student Personnel Services; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

A literature search and review was conducted by the Two-Year College Student Development Research Committee of the American College Personnel Association to investigate the overall character of typical research on two-year college student development concerns. The student development research conducted at the two-year college level contrasted markedly with other postsecondary research in this area in that more often two-year college research was institution specific, focused on general student and environment descriptions, employed survey methods, was motivated by institutional program concerns, and was usually unpublished. A computer search covering the years 1975 through 1984, yielded 141 relevant research reports. These reports were analyzed in terms of populations or targets of the study, research methods used, year of publication, study topics, and publication outlet. The analyzed reports consisted primarily of studies on student characteristics; follow-up and graduate surveys; needs assessments; transfer studies; and assessments of program effectiveness, educational benefits, counseling services, attrition, and special programs. Student development research should also address the development status of students at college entry, methods to ensure service delivery equity across diverse populations, and the comparative effects of various program delivery methods. (EJV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED260752

TWO-YEAR COLLEGE RESEARCH ON STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED LITERATURE, 1975-1984

A Report to Commission XI

American College Personnel Association

March 1985

Don G. Creamer, Chair

Research Committee
Commission XI

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

JC 850 464

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. G. Creamer

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Preface..... 1

2. Overview of Research on Student Development..... 3

3. Research on Two-Year College Student Development..... 4

4. Method..... 7

5. Findings and Discussion..... 8

6. Future Needs for Research in Two-Year Colleges..... 15

1. PREFACE

The Research Committee of Commission XI was launched officially at the Baltimore Convention of ACPA in the Spring 1984 with the appointment of a Chair. During the following year, the Chair recruited and appointed three professionals practicing in the field of student affairs in two-year colleges and initiated a process of considering a proper role for the Committee. Those appointed to the Committee include Charles R. Dassance, Vice President of Student Services and Development at the Florida Junior College at Jacksonville, Roy Giroux, Vice President for Educational and Faculty Services at Humber College in Toronto, and Paul Toscano, Counselor at Charles County Community College in LaPlata, Maryland.

The Committee considered its preferred role within the Commission and drafted an Operations Guide for submission to the Directorate of the Commission containing proposals for both short- and long-term goals and activities. Progress has been made on the achievement of some of the goals during the year and some additional progress is expected during the Boston Convention. A theme-track session of this convention includes a presentation and discussion of research on student development in the two-year college, chaired by Dr. Dassance. Other members of the Committee on Research will participate in the session from which we hope to gain additional insight into the status of and

needs for research in the areas of greatest concern to our constituencies. Achievement toward another goal is reflected in the report which follows, aimed at reviewing the overall character of typical research on two-year college concerns for student development. Hopefully, further insights into the true nature of this research thrust and guidance for the future for both researchers and for the Committee of Commission XI will be gained from a thorough discussion of the report.

Charles R. Dassance

Roy Giroux

Paul Toscano

Don G. Creamer, Chair

2. OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH ON STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

Consumers of research on student development may be impressed by the breadth or scope of the published reports, a clear characteristic of journal publications, or may be dismayed by the specificity of, and sometimes seeming irrelevancy of, operationalized variables used to structure the studies, an equally apparent occasional condition in such research. The researchers' intentions to understand complex and far-ranging issues, problems, or phenomena of person or of environment are impressive indeed. Inquiries into student values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors and the environments which nurture and sometimes inhibit normal or intentional change or development often are sophisticated and result in findings both poignant and instructive to professionals in the field of student affairs. Findings which befuddle the consumer, and sometimes seem only to clutter the literature with redundant conclusions, also are results of well-intended researchers in student affairs. On balance, however, most published research on student development appears fortunately to be focused on important areas of concern for professionals in the field and contains findings of genuine significance.

3. RESEARCH ON TWO-YEAR COLLEGE STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

Whether it might be so if some other single type of college were isolated from the rest for special consideration cannot be reported, since no other type of college was studied for this analysis; however, the nature of research on student development in two-year colleges contrasts markedly from the picture painted for all of higher education. Two-year college research on student development often is institution-specific (N=1), focuses on general descriptions of students and environments, usually employs survey methods, appears motivated by institutional programming concerns, usually is unpublished in the journals of the profession, and/or is nonexistent.

There are many competing explanations for such important differences in the quality and utility of published research across institutional types. The most often cited is that two-year college practitioners do not conduct research suitable for publication ir prestigious, refereed journals. They are untrained and unrewarded for these activities, so the argument goes. They also may be uninterested due, in part, by their heavy student contact loads and by their concern for students to be accepted in their present condition rather than as subjects for experimentation. Certainly, the lack of reward likely would lead to sporatic investment of professional time in research activity.

It also may be said that those in university settings, where research is rewarded, are not contributing equally to two-year college student development concerns as they are to concerns more often associated with residential, university life. This can hardly be a surprise, however, since researchers often use accessible subjects and concern themselves with issues of personal interest. Of the professors in preparation programs, only a handful profess focused interest or concern for the two-year college type, resulting in the most prolific professional writers in the profession contributing little to such a specialized area on concern.

This portrait should be balanced with another view. Indeed, by institutional type contrast, research on the two-year college student development concerns is sparse and often ungeneralizable. It could be argrued, however, that there is no compelling reason why researchers in student development need concern themselves with the two-year college type apart from other institutional types. Human development theory and research teach clearly how similar late adolescents and early adults are along many developmental dimensions, such as struggles with identity, searches for value stability, quests for competence, and drives for meaningful interpersonal relations. Why should anyone expect differences across populations of students based on enrollment in diverse types of colleges on such fundamental human traits as these? Perhaps there is little or no need for such focused research, according to this argument.

The fact remains that two-year college student affairs professionals believe firmly that important differences do exist in their students when comparisions are made with other institutional types (especially with residential colleges and universities), and that researchers have sorely neglected their concerns. The analysis of literature reported here strongly supports the case for neglect.

4. METHOD

A computer search of literature, spanning the years 1975-1984, was employed which triangulated descriptors of (a) community colleges, two-year colleges, and technical institutes, (b) school effectiveness, outcomes of education, student personnel services, student development, and individual development, and (c) research reports. This search yielded 168 annotated reports of which 27 were found to be unrelated to the main area of interest and were eliminated from the analysis. All other annotated reports were read and classified by (a) populations and/or targets of the studies, (b) method employed in the studies, (c) year of publication, (d) topics of the studies, and (e) publication outlet type.

A limited, and largely unscientific, observational review also was conducted in the 1982-1984 Journal of College Student Personnel and the NASPA Journal to search for reports which were focused on the two-year college.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research reports from the computer search were largely ERIC reports, with only 19 of the total of 141 usable reports shown as published in a journal. Obviously, delimiting the search on student development research reports to two-year colleges severely constricted the available reports published in journals.

Figures 1 - 4 are used to summarize the research reports yielded from the computer search. The Figures contain actual frequency count by category in each perspective on the materials. The number of single- case reports as shown in Figure 1 constitutes 48% of the reports, while reports with a state-wide target constituted 20% and those with wider geographic focus constituted 32%. A clear majority of these reports were conducted by researchers concerned with matters at one college and offer little or no generalizable findings.

Figure 2 is used to display the preponderate methods of the research reports and shows a clear preference for the survey (58%). Conference reports, project descriptions, and position papers were favored by 6%, 4%, and 8% of the researchers respectively. The remaining 23% of the reports were composed of literature reviews, experimental and quasi-experimental designs, telephone interviews, descriptive profiles, doctoral dissertations and masters theses, and unknown methods.

Distribution of the publications by year is reasonably consistent as can be seen in Figure 3. Perhaps the most revealing observation to be made based on these data is how few reports are issued in any year.

The range of topics in the reports analyzed was considerable indeed, revealing 38 somewhat different issues addressed in the reports. The categories were collapsed into the topic areas as shown in Figure 4 by grouping logically similar concerns. This method was not carried to an extreme, however, since it might be said that studies are conceptually similar which focus on student characteristics, follow-up studies, graduate surveys, needs assessment, and transfer studies, but these categories were retained because of their perennial nature and representativeness of studies on student development in two-year colleges. Studies on student characteristics constituted 16% of the total, follow-up and graduate surveys 19%, need assessment studies, transfer studies, program effectiveness studies, and educational benefits 6% each of the total, counseling services 5%, student attrition 4%, special programs studies 4%, and all other topics 32%. It is mildly surprising that only 4% of the total were devoted to studies of student attrition since this topic is far more conspicuous in journal literature.

An examination to recent literature in the Journal of College Student Personnel and the NASPA Journal is notable by the near absence of research reports on two-year student development. Of those that do appear in these journals, they are more likely

to be written either by a recent doctoral graduate or someone outside the two-year college environment than by a two-year college employee.

It seems safe to conclude that student development research available for practitioner consumption which focuses on two-year college issues is far more limited in number and potentially of less value than research on student development without a focus on two-year college issues.

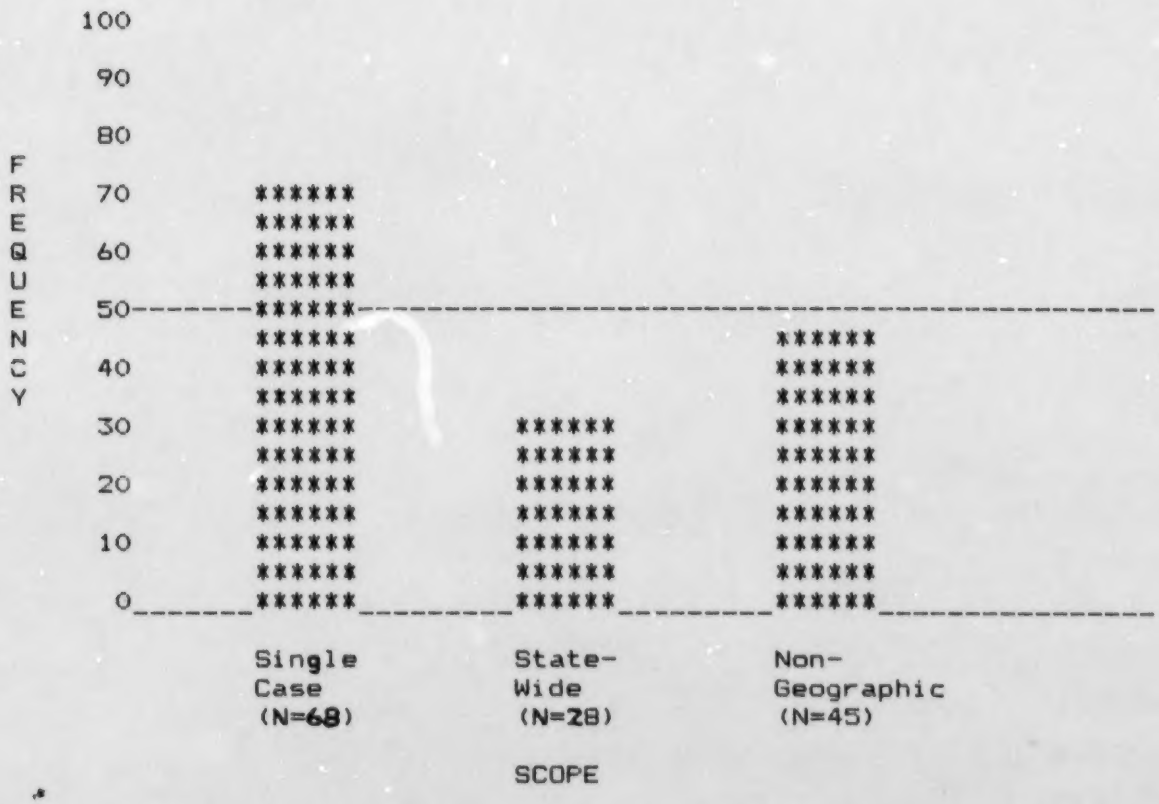

Figure 1. Populations and/or Targets of Studies

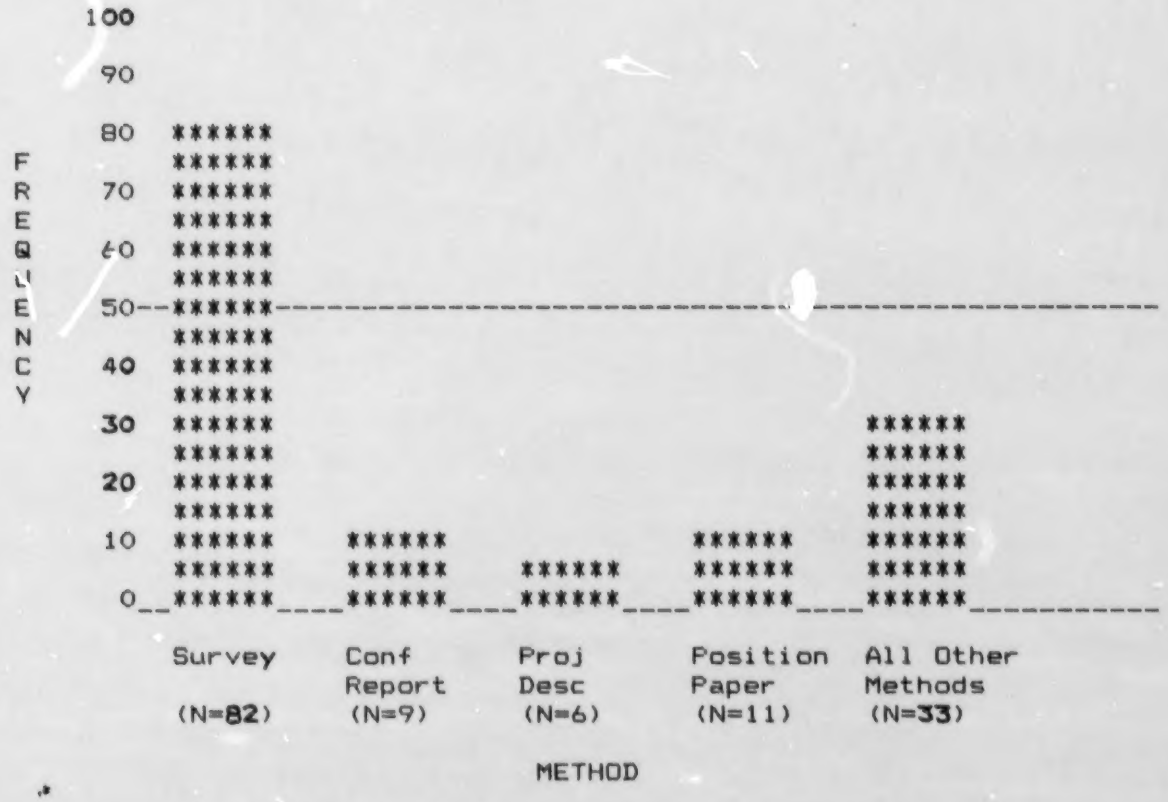

Figure 2. Comparison of Research Methods

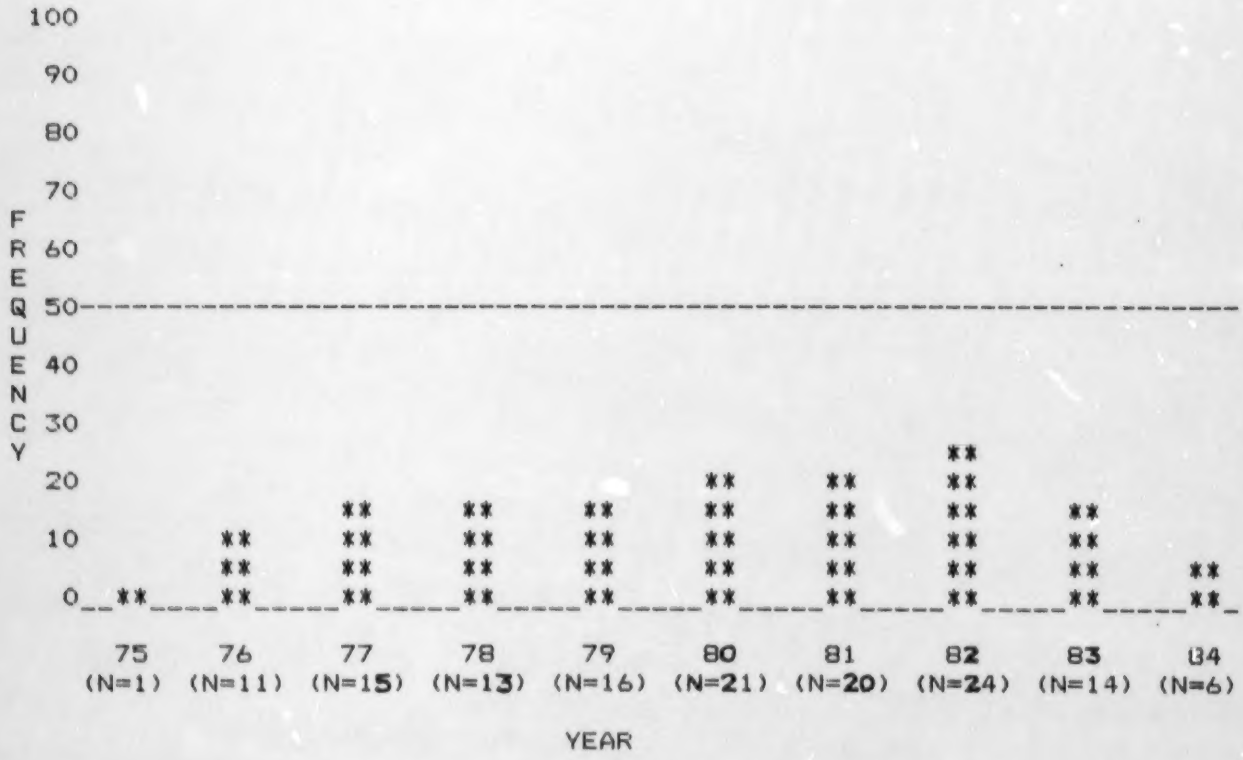

Figure 3. Distribution of Publications by Year

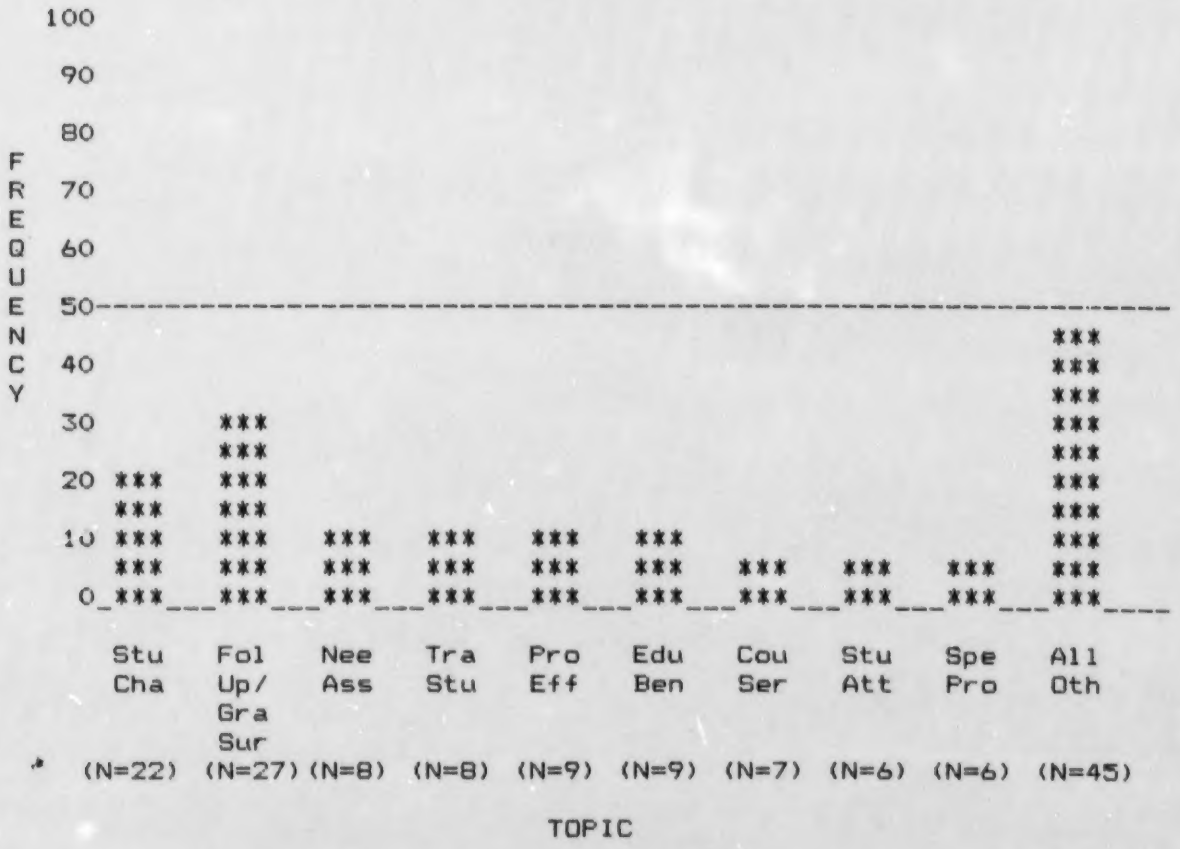

Figure 4. Distribution of Studies by Topic

6. FUTURE NEEDS FOR RESEARCH IN TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

Ideas expressed in this section are those of the Chair of the Research Committee. They may represent considerable bias or short-sightedness oweing to the author's values, experience, and visions for the future of the two-year college. Other members of the Committee were unable to review these thoughts prior to publication and must not be blamed for deficient recommendations. These ideas are offered cautiously and modestly and beg for dialogue with a broad sample of professionals who are willing to shape them into something of greater value to the profession.

One of the most apparent needs for the future is to cut back on the efforts made to describe the two-year college student. The efforts expended to date yield redundant reports essentially stating that two-year college students are heterogeneous in their characteristics, leading potentially to the erroneous conclusion that they are different in educationally important ways from students at all other types of colleges. They may be, and, if so, we now have sufficient evidence on which to base strategic interventions on their behalf, at least for the immediate future. I suspect strongly, however, that on the dimensions which matter most to student development educators, they resemble most students at most other types of colleges. If this is true, it seems prudent for two-year college practitioners to base their interventions on precisely the same evidence as do practitioners

from other types of colleges.

Whether agreement can be reached on this controversial argument, it seems apparent to any observer than the methods of inquiry into student development concerns at the two-year colleges need to be extended beyond the survey. We need to know more of measurable effects of interventions on students and the survey method limits this information to self reports and perceptions. As valuable as these indicators are, they need to be considered a part of a larger arsenal of indicators and not as the final word on intervention effect.

Some general suggestions for research on student development in the two-year college follow:

1. We need to assess the development status of students at entry to the college in strategic areas defined by extant theory on human development, design appropriate interventions, and evaluate effects on students along the predetermined dimensions.

2. We need to create ways of measuring the college environment as defined by extant theory on person and environment fit or congruence and determine the qualities of the environment which make it "developmental."

3. We need to study methods of improving students' moral and ethical reasoning.

4. We need to determine comparative effects on students'

reasoning by professionals with differentiated levels of reasoning.

5. We need to study methods of making the two-year college experience more potent with regard to effects on students.

6. We need to study methods of ensuring equity of service delivery across diverse student populations.

7. We need to compare potency of student service programs delivered within and outside a curricular mode.

8. We need to study methods of ensuring quality student/faculty interactions.

9. We need to study methods of expanding opportunities for general student involvement in learning both inside and outside the classroom.

10. We need to study effects on students of demanding high versus low academic expectations.

11. We need to study methods of expanding genuine and accurate feedback to students regarding their progress toward educational goals.

12. We need to study the effects on students of systematic and scientific interviews with students about their educational experience.

13. We need to study the relationship of specificity and

appropriateness of educational goals and achievement by students.

14. We need to study differentiated patterns of use of student services by student age and sex.

15. We need to discover advantages, if any, of attending a two-year college over other types of colleges.

16. We need to study comparative methods of program delivery, especially one-on-one or small-group methods versus large-group or institution-wide methods.

17. We need to study comparative effects on students of service delivered in conventional formats versus the exclusive use of mediated approaches.

ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE
FOR JUNIOR COLLEGES
OCT 11 1985